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UNIT I

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF PERSONALITY: ASSESSMENT, RESEARCH AND PERSPECTIVE

The Study of Personality:

Personality can be defined as the distinctive and unique ways in which each individual thinks, feels and acts, which characterise a person's response throughout life. In other words, it can be said that personality refers to all those relatively permanent traits, dispositions or characteristics within the person that give some measure of consistency to the person's behaviour. These traits may be unique, common to some groups or shared by the entire species but their pattern will be different from individual to individual. It is in this sense that Allport (1937, 1961), defined personality as the dynamic organisation within the person of the psychophysical systems that determine the unique adjustments to one's environment.

The Place of Personality in the history of Psychology

The Study of consciousness

The new science of psychology focused on the analysis of conscious experience into its elemental parts. The methods of psychology were modeled on the approach used in the natural sciences. Physics and chemistry appeared to be unlocking the secrets of the physical universe by reducing all matter to its basic elements and analyzing them. If the physical world could be understood by breaking it down into elements, why couldn't the mind or the mental world be studied in the same way?

Wundt and other psychologists of his day who were concerned with studying human nature were greatly influenced by the natural science approach, and they proceeded to apply it to the study of the mind. Because these researchers limited

themselves to the experimental method, they studied only those mental processes that might be affected by some external stimulus that could be manipulated and controlled by the experimenter.

There was no room in this experimental psychology approach for such a complex, multidimensional topic as personality. It was not compatible with either the subject matter or the methods of the new psychology.

The study of behaviour

In the early decades of the 20th century, the American psychologist John B. Watson, at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland, sparked a revolution against the work of Wilhelm Wundt. Watson's movement, called behaviorism, opposed Wundt's focus on conscious experience. More devoted than Wundt to a natural science approach, Watson argued that if psychology was to be a science, it had to focus only on the tangible aspects of human nature—that which could be seen, heard, recorded, and measured. Only overt behavior—not consciousness—could be the legitimate topic of psychology.

Consciousness, Watson said, cannot be seen or experimented upon. Therefore, like the philosophers' concept of the soul, consciousness is meaningless for science. Psychologists must deal only with what they can see, manipulate, and measure—that is, external stimuli and the subject's behavioral responses to them. According to Watson, whatever happens inside the person after the stimulus is presented and before the response is made cannot be seen. Because we can only speculate about it, it is of no interest or value to science.

Behaviourism presents a mechanistic picture of human beings as well-ordered Machines that respond automatically to external stimuli. It has been said that behaviourists see people as a kind of vending machine. Stimuli are put in, and appropriate responses, learned from past experience, spill out. In this view, personality is nothing more than the accumulation of learned responses or habit systems, a definition later offered by another American psychologist, B. F. Skinner. Thus, behaviourists reduced personality to what could be seen and observed objectively, and there was no place in their conception for consciousness or for unconscious forces. However, the more recent social learning theorists, who offer explanations derived from Watson's and Skinner's versions of behaviourism, have restored to personality some measure of consciousness.

The study of the unconscious

Those aspects of human nature were dealt with by a third line of inquiry, one that arose independently of Wundt and Watson. Sigmund Freud, a physician in Vienna, Austria, started investigating them in the 1890s. Freud called his system psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis and psychology are not synonymous or interchangeable terms. Freud was not a psychologist but was a physician in private practice, working with persons who suffered from emotional disturbances. Although trained as a scientist, Freud did not use the experimental method. Rather, he developed his theory of personality based on clinical observation of his patients. Through a lengthy series of psychoanalytic sessions, Freud applied his creative interpretation to what patients told him about their feelings and past experiences, both actual and fantasized. His approach was thus quite different from the rigorous experimental laboratory investigation of the elements of conscious experience or of behaviour.

Inspired by Freud's psychoanalytic approach, a group of personality theorists developed unique conceptions of human nature outside the mainstream of experimental psychology.

These theorists, the neo-psychoanalysts, focused on the whole person as he or she functions in the real world, not on elements of behaviour or stimulus-response units as studied in the psychology laboratory. The neo-psychoanalysts accepted the existence of conscious and unconscious forces, whereas the behaviourists accepted the existence only of that which they could see. As a result, the early personality theorists were speculative in their work, relying more on inferences based on observations of their patients' behaviour than on the quantitative analysis of laboratory data.

Definitions of personality

We often use the word personality when we are describing other people and ourselves, and we all believe we know what it means. Perhaps we do. One psychologist suggested that we can get a good idea of its meaning if we examine our intentions whenever we use the word I (Adams, 1954). When you say I, you are, in effect, summing up everything about yourself—your likes and dislikes, fears and virtues, strengths and weaknesses. The word I is what defines you as an individual, separate from all others.

We may also in our use of the word personality refer to enduring characteristics. We assume that personality is relatively stable and predictable. Although we

recognize, for example, that a friend may be calm much of the time, we know that he or she can become excitable, nervous, or panicky at other times. Thus, our personality can vary with the situation. Yet although it is not rigid, it is generally resistant to sudden changes.

In the 1960s a debate erupted within psychology about the relative impact on behaviour of such enduring personal variables as traits and needs versus variables relating to the situation (see Mischel, 1968, 1973). The controversy continued for some 20 years and concluded with the realization that the “longstanding and controversy generating dichotomy between the effect of the situation versus the effect of the person on behavior ... is and always was a fake” (Funder, 2001, p. 200). And so the issue was resolved by accepting an interactionist approach, agreeing that enduring and stable personal traits, changing aspects of the situation, and the interaction between them must all be considered in order to provide a full explanation for human nature.

Assessment, Research and Theory in the Study of Personality

Personality assessment refers to the estimation of one’s personality make up, that is the person’s characteristic behaviour patterns and salient and stable characteristics. As there are different theoretical accounts of personality, and the question is how do people find out what kind of personality they have? The methods of estimating or measuring or assessing personality vary according to the theory of personality used to develop those methods.

METHODS OF PERSONALITY ASSESSMENT

Some of the important tests and techniques measuring personality include (i) Interviews (ii) Projective techniques (iii) Association techniques (iv) Expressive techniques

3.3.1 Interviews

Interview is a method of personality assessment in which the interviewee has to answer the questions asked by the professional, in a structured or unstructured fashion. Some therapists note down the answers of the interviewee in a survey process. This type of interview is unstructured in manner and moves naturally.

Limitations of Interviews

Interview by the psychologist demands the report of innermost feeling, concerns and urges on the part of client. This is something that can be known

directly by the client/interviewee and thus, the problems encountered with self report data like survey are faced with interviewing also. Interviewees/Clients can misinform, lie, distort the actual facts or reality and hide the true information for social desirability. Also, biases can occur on the part of the interviewers as their personal belief system or prejudices may put obstacles in the interpretation of the information given by the interviewee.

Halo effect is the other problem with interviews. Halo effect is a tendency to form a favorable or unfavorable impression of someone at the first meeting and after that first impression all of the comments and behaviour of that person are interpreted in agreement with the impression. Those who make a good first impression due to clothing, physical appearance or some other characteristic seem to have a “halo” for everything they do in a positive light.

Projective Techniques

These techniques are assumed to reveal those central aspects of personality that lie in the unconscious mind of an individual. Unconscious motivations, hidden desires, inner fears and complexes are presumed to be elicited by their unstructured nature that affect the client’s conscious behaviour. The assignment of a relatively unstructured task is a major distinguishing feature of projective techniques. An unstructured task is one that permits an endless range of possible responses. The underlying hypothesis of projective techniques is that the way the test material or “structures” are perceived and interpreted by the individual, reflects the fundamental aspects of her or his psychological functioning. In other words, the test material serves as a sort of screen on which respondents “project” their characteristic thought processes, anxieties, conflicts and needs. Clients are shown ambiguous visual stimuli by the psychologist and are asked to tell what they see in that stimuli. It is presumed that the client will project the unconscious concerns and fears onto the visual stimulus and thus the psychologist can interpret the responses and understand the psychodynamic underlying the problem of the client. Tests that utilise this method are called projective tests. These tests, besides their function of exploring one’s personality, also serve as a diagnostic tool to uncover the hidden personality issues.

The history of projective techniques began in the beginning of the 15th century when Leonardo da Vinci selected pupils on the basis of their attempt to find shapes and patterns in ambiguous form (Piotrowski, 1972). In 1879, a Word association test was constructed by Gallon. Similar tests were used in

clinical settings by Carl Jung. Later, Frank (1939, 1948) introduced the term projective method to describe a range of tests which could be used to study personality with unstructured stimuli. This way, the individual has enough opportunity to project his own personality attributes which in the course of normal interview or conversation the person would not reveal. More specifically, projective instruments also represent disguised testing procedures in the sense that the test takers are not aware of the psychological interpretation to be made of their responses. Rather than measuring the traits separately the attention is focused on the composite picture. Finally, projective techniques are an effective tool to reveal the latent or hidden aspects of personality that remain embedded in the unconscious until uncovered. These techniques are based on the assumption that if the stimulus structure is weak in nature, it allows the individual to project his/ her feelings, desires and needs that are further interpreted by the experts.

Association Techniques

This category includes all those situations where responses are to be given by the examinee in the form of associations which he makes after seeing or listening to the stimulus material . E.g. The Word Association Test etc. In the Word-Association test, the examinee is provided with a number of words in the form of a list and he is required to utter the very first word that comes to his mind on listening the stimulus word. The responses in accordance with the reaction time are used for the analysis of personality of the individual.

INK BLOT TECHNIQUES

The Ink blot techniques consist of two popular techniques, that is, The Rorschach Test and The Holtzman Ink blot test. In these tests the examinee has to respond to an unstructured situation composed of some ink blots.

Construction Techniques

All those situations are included here in which a story is constructed by the examinee on seeing the stimulus material within some given time limit. The themes and mode of responding are considered relevant in such tests. The Thematic Apperception Test (TAT), the Object Relations Test are some of the examples of construction techniques. Some other tests like Draw-A-Person test are also included in this category. In all these tests, the examinee constructs or produces simple/complex statements in a story form or draws some picture or person.

Completion Techniques

These include the situations where some incomplete sentences are presented to the examinee and he can complete them in the form he desires.

For example

I want

I feel excited about.....

The subject has to fill up the blanks and the responses given by the examinee are recorded and analysed to get a picture of the individual's personality.

For example,

Rotter's Incomplete Sentences Blank. Some people consider it as a semi projective technique.

Expressive Techniques

These include those tests where some manipulative tasks are used by the examinee to depict his or her personality. Some interaction with the given material is the theme of these techniques. Some of the common expressive techniques include role playing, finger painting, play, drawing etc. The characteristic feature of expressive techniques is that the examiner pays much attention to the manner in which the given materials are manipulated by the examinee.

The Rorschach Inkblot Test

Rorschach inkblot test was developed in 1921 by Swiss psychiatrist Hermann Rorschach. It consists of 10 inkblots, five in black ink on a white background and five in colored inks on a white background. The Rorschach test is a measure of both the intellectual and non intellectual personality traits. While developing this technique, Rorschach experimented with a large number of ink blots which were administered to different psychiatric groups. On the basis of such clinical observations various psychiatric syndromes that differentiate response characteristics were taken up in the scoring system.

In the test ,the subjects are asked to simply state whatever each inkblot looks like to them. Responses are scored by the psychologists using predetermined categories, on key factors such as color and shape, movement, whether the whole or part blot has been seen, and whether the response is given in content to the whole or to peculiar details in the blot. These blots are frequently used for personality description, diagnosis of mental disorders and for behaviour predictions (Watkins et al, 1995; Wiener, 1997).

The whole procedure of The Rorschach Test is a combined set of three components, viz., performance proper, inquiry, and scoring. Let us deal with

each of these one by one.

Administration of Rorschach test

The administration of the Rorschach test can be put up in two stages as given below.

a) Performance proper

The examinee is asked to get seated and rapport is established with him. First plate is then handled to the client with the question "What do you think this could be?" During the process the examinee needs to be careful about the following things:

- 1) Reaction time which means the time gap between the card presentation and examinee's response. Exclamations and comments are excluded from scoring.
- 2) The position of the card is also taken account of while examinee is responding and are scored as v , \wedge , $<$, $>$. depending on the direction in which the card is turned.
- 3) The responses are recorded verbatim for the reason that the examiner can read it and analyse the same effectively.
- 4) The total time for which the card is kept by the subject is also recorded. The time lapsed between the presentation of the card and the first response the subject gives is called the reaction time.

Scoring of Rorschach test

The major differences among the various scoring systems of the Rorschach test flourished in 1930s to the 1960s. There is also the focus of concern for Rorschach interpretation based either on the content of the responses or on their formal characteristics, such as location, determinants, form quality, and the various quantitative summaries derived from the responses, that is, the content. Scoring of location is important. *Location* refers to that part of the plot with which each response of the subject is associated. For example, whether the whole blot or a common detail or a usual detail has been used by the respondent and are scored as W , D , d , Dd etc. The determinants of the response include form, color shading and "movement" and are coded as F , C , S , M etc. The respondent's perception of the blot as a moving object is scored in context of "movement". The various types of movement include human movement, animal movement etc. The form quality of responses may depict the precision with which the response match the location used, to their originality. The treatment of content also varies from one Rorschach system to another except some major regularly employed categories. Some of the main

categories are human figures, human details, animal details etc. and are coded as *H, A, Hd, Ad* etc. Some other broad scoring categories may include art objects, plants, maps, landscapes, clothing etc. For each of the 10 cards, certain specific responses are scored as popular because of their common occurrence and thus, constitute the popularity score. Qualitative interpretations of the Rorschach scores include the association of “whole” responses with conceptual thinking. The colour responses given by the subject are indicative of the subject’s emotionality and fantasy life. The entire response for all the 10 cards including the enquiry are integrated together to interpret the psychodynamics underlying the problem and also decide upon the diagnostic issues.

However, after a prolonged use of the Rorschach test as a psychometric instrument, some of the researchers found a number of difficulties inherent in the method itself, such as the variability in the total number of responses, examiner effects and interdependence of scores etc. The five major Rorschach systems in use developed in the United States show vast differences which were documented by John E. Exner, Jr. (1969). He, with his extensive investigations of clinical use of the Rorschach Test came up with a single, distilled system encompassing all the useful features being possessed by the method. Questions are also asked about the reliability and validity of the assessment done through the Rorschach Test.

In this context, it is pertinent to mention here that the Rorschach Ink blot test was never developed as a psychometric tool, rather, it was developed as an instrument to aid in the clinical diagnosis. To briefly state about this test, it can be concluded that more research still needs to be conducted to invent a standard method of administration and scoring of the Rorschach Test.